

Miami Herald

H1

PIECING TOGETHER A TRAGEDY



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After a gunman opens fire on campus, Jorge Zapata, 16, a sophomore, hugs his mother, Lavinia Zapata, outside Marjory Stoneman Douglas High in Parkland. A former student shot and killed 17 people on Wednesday.

Minute by terrible minute, the unthinkable unfolded...

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It was Valentine’s Day across America.
At an all-American high school in a green and placid Broward County suburb strung with waterways and golf-course communities, that innocent fact would take on dreadful significance well before the day was out.

Between classes at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High, near the sharp, straight line where suburban Parkland meets the Everglades, students exchanged chocolates, flowers and cards.
It was another full, demanding day at the A-plus public school, which at 3,200 students is larger than many colleges. One history class would have a lesson on the Holocaust. There would be drama class, study hall, group projects to work on. The Junior ROTC would do parade drills. The school’s award-winning color guard would work on its routines.
At the gym complex, head football coach Willis May received recruiters from a small Massachu-

setts college in his office.
Early that morning, not far from the school’s expansive campus, a troubled young man named Nikolas Cruz was awakened for school by his host, James Snead. Snead and his wife, whose son was one of Cruz’s few friends, had taken in the young man after he lost his mother — his father had died previously —
SEE MINUTES, 4A

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- The shooter left a long paper trail of violent behavior, **2A**
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 - For teen who survived shooting, history repeats itself, **6A**

MARJORY STONEMAN DOUGLAS SHOOTING

Shooter cut self, displayed Nazi symbol; DCF judged him stable

■ Nikolas Cruz cut his arms on Snapchat and said he wanted to buy a gun. This was in 2016, more than a year before he was accused of killing 17 people in a school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High in Parkland.

BY CAROL MARBIN MILLER
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Nikolas Cruz had just broken up with his girlfriend, who had been cheating on him, and he’d gotten into a fight with another boy. He’d drawn a “Nazi symbol” on his book bag. And Broward mental health authorities were worried that his chronic depression was worsening.
It was Sept. 28, 2016, and Cruz — who since has admitted to perpetrating one of the worst school shootings in U.S. history, Wednesday’s massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High — took to his arms with a knife.
“Mr. Cruz was on Snapchat cutting both of his arms,” the Florida Department of Children & Families’ abuse hotline was told at 1:48 p.m. “Mr. Cruz has fresh cuts on both his arms. Mr. Cruz stated he plans to go out and buy a gun.”
In the report, Cruz, then 18, was listed as an “alleged victim” of medical neglect and inadequate supervision; his mother, 68-year-old Lynda Cruz, the “alleged perpetrator.”
DCF’s investigation was completed that Nov. 12. The agency concluded that Cruz had not been mistreated by his mother, that he was receiving adequate care from a counselor at Henderson Mental Health, and was attending school.
“Henderson came out and assessed the [victim and] found him to be stable

enough not to be hospitalized,” the report said. More detailed chronological notes of the investigation show the case ended with a notation that “no services are recommended.”
The investigation appears to have lacked rigor: An exceptional student education specialist who worked with Cruz repeatedly declined to return phone calls from DCF’s adult protective services investigator. The school’s resource officer, a deputy, “refused to share any information” at all, except to confirm that a mobile crisis unit had been out to the school to assess Cruz. Cruz himself also wouldn’t cooperate, saying that “he talked about the situation enough.”
If Cruz had, in fact, been cutting himself that day, the investigator appears to have made little effort to confirm the allegation: The investigator, the report said, “was not able to see any scars or cuts on the [victim’s] arms because he was wearing long sleeves.”
Henderson reported to DCF that Cruz “was not at risk to harm himself or others.”
Cruz’s counselor told DCF that the teen was reported to have “an emotional behavioral disability.” Disciplinary reports obtained by the Miami Herald confirm his educational difficulties. At Westglades Middle School in 2013, he’d been cited numerous times for disruption.
SEE CRUZ, 2A

Teachers, students were instinctive heroes when there was absolutely no time to think

■ In an era when school shootings are no longer rare or even unexpected, the teachers and students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas were trained to act as first responders to one of America’s worst tragedies.

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Scott Beigel had a choice as gunfire exploded around him: Keep the dead-

bolt on his third-floor geography class locked, or open up and usher terrified students to safety.
With a gunman on a murderous rampage, there was little time to act and less to think. There were no police officers in the halls to protect them, no paramedics on campus to treat the wounded.
There was just Nikolas Cruz and his Smith & Wesson M&P 15, a classroom

of scared teenagers, and Beigel, a teacher forced to choose between the training that told him to keep the door locked and kids begging for their lives.
He sacrificed himself for his kids, dying in the doorway of the room where he taught, using his last breath to yell that his classroom was empty in a final effort to save the students.
“He doesn’t deserve that,” Mia Sanchez, who hid under a desk and watched Beigel collapse, said Thursday.
No one at Marjory Stoneman Dou-

SEE HEROES, 8A



Facebook

Scott Beigel

SPORTS

WILD RIDE FOR HEAT’S DRAGIC

The Heat’s Goran Dragic, who will play for Team LeBron in the NBA All-Star Game in Los Angeles on Sunday night, has had a wild ride over the past seven months. **1C**



TROPICAL SUNDAY

‘BLACK PANTHER’ A WATERSHED

Leonard Pitts: ‘Black Panther’ is easily one of the best superhero movies ever made. And more important, it is a watershed in the cultural history of African Americans. **1M**

VENEZUELA

A DEATH TRAP FOR SOME

As Venezuela crumbles, a mother makes a desperate journey to Colombia to save her daughter, who has medical problems. Their plight is not uncommon. **25A**

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